

“The Chronicle Series”

Congleton Chronicle – Alsager Chronicle - Biddulph Chronicle – Sandbach Chronicle

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Company number: 2154383 VAT: 157 331471

11 High Street,

Congleton

CW12 1BW.

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Introduction

We are family-owned paid-for weekly whose titles date back to 1893. In an earlier form, we go back further and a similar business has operated from our address for at least 250 years.

We publish four titles. The Congleton Chronicle is our flagship title, brings in most revenue and has the most sales. We also publish the Biddulph Chronicle, Sandbach Chronicle (est 1944) and the Alsager Chronicle (est 2014).

We are a traditional paper in many ways but try to be outspoken and act as a voice for the community. We still cover most council meetings and all magistrates' courts. We have a strong op-ed section, including editorial.

Standards

Our minimum standard is the editor's code of conduct. We also adhere to the US Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics. (see attached). Editorial staff are furnished with copies of the code and guidance, and these are regularly referred to.

All our stories are verified. We speak to both sides of any story. The only times this fails is with new trainees, when they are learning on the job.

We do have an issue with comments of rebuttal. We always contact parties who are being criticised, but a large proportion do not reply before “deadline”. Cheshire East Council probably responds about 30% of the time and sometimes complains its comments do not make the paper. “Deadline” is in quotes because the deadline is flexible: we do not sit around waiting for comments, but have to make up pages throughout the week. In other words, we go to press at 5.30pm on a Wednesday but for production reasons this is not the deadline for all pages. With the council, we do not know in advance which third of queries it will respond to, so we can't hold those stories.

We have a standard footnote for stories for which we have not received a comment: “X was contacted for a comment but had not replied by the time we went to press”. We sometimes get complaints from people who comment at 3pm on a Wednesday – we aim to have the paper done by around 5pm – and whose comments do not go in. In these cases, we offer them a follow-up story the following week.

All stories are checked on the page by the editor or his deputy, and any stories that do not appear fair are pulled from that page, though this is rare.

We are a small company so adherence to standards is perhaps different to larger news centres. The editor closely follows the news list for the week and will speak to a reporter if a possible risk can be seen. Stories are checked on the page, as stated above.

We have had no complaints to Ipso made against us this year.

Complaints procedure

In theory, we have a formal complaints procedure, in practice it is rarely used – this is the third Ipso report we have produced and the formal complaints system, as stated in the information panel we print every week, has not been used once.

We are accessible to readers, particularly via social media where our editor has his own page, and most readers communicate via email. Most of our staff live in the area. We have amicable relationships with local groups and societies.

Complaints arrive in a variety of ways: social media, the telephone, email, being stopped in the street, via family members. Any that concern factual errors or “proper” errors are recorded and investigated.

Complaints are channelled according to their seriousness. Most are dealt with by the reporters and more serious ones by our deputy editor. He may consult the editor.

As the old saying has it: “The man who never made a mistake never made anything”; mistakes go with the job. We have no problem printing corrections and apologies. We see apologies as a way of maintaining our standing in the community, and not as something to hide. If we make a mistake, we admit to it and people appreciate this.

It is not always newspapers in the wrong. This year we have had to install a panic button because two criminals objected to us reporting their cases. Both came in and threatened staff. One had committed a drink-related affray and came straight to us from the pub, clearly not having learned his lesson.

Complaints

Since the creation of Ipso we have noticed a change in the complaints we get. The more serious errors – where an angle in a story is inaccurate or misleading – have largely gone, because we ask ourselves: “How would Ipso rule if a complaint was made”. What we are left with are genuine mistakes; what people can easily see are mistakes.

The genuine mistakes, with one exception (see below), are usually silly errors, often down to fat fingers; for example saying a charity event has raised £2,000 instead of £200. By the terms of the editor’s code these would not be significant errors. Ipso has said that all complainants should be advised of the code of conduct but – as we have pointed out to Ipso – this makes no sense when the issue is whether a summer fete raised £100 or £125. We simply acknowledge the complaint and run a correction.

It is worth noting that Leveson and much of the subsequent debate is centred on unethical, unprofessional and even illegal activity by so-called journalists, whereas nearly all mistakes in the regional Press are down to human error or, in a few cases, poor judgement.

We used to print (in the spirit of the SPJ) an occasional column that listed all errors and tried to explain why they happened. Given the lack of more serious complaints, we have not produced one this year. We will try harder for 2018. Complaints where we have made a factual error, or error of judgement that warrants an apology, are logged in a book. More serious emailed / Facebooked complaints are saved digitally. We investigate the causes and if appropriate, issue a clarification / apology / correction, depending on the circumstance. If the error is more than a simple mistake we will consult the staff member who is responsible, to avoid the mistake happening again.

Positioning of corrections

All corrections go on the letters page. We have noted Ipso rulings on letters pages, but our letters pages are the best read part of the paper, so we are in no sense burying corrections. We average five or six pages of letters every week. We run a corrections panel in the same position in the letters section, whether or not we have corrections to make. We do not use page templates or run identical lay-outs each week so it is hard to run the corrections section on the same page.

If the complaint was about a front page story (or any other prominent page lead) the correction would go there if we/the complainant felt this was necessary.

Traceability

Our website is behind a paywall, so no stories go on the web that have not been in the paper. All excerpts of hard news stories that go on social media are subbed and have been in the paper.

Some community news and police alerts will go on social media before being in the paper but have full traceability.

We are a training ground for reporters and our IT was designed with this in mind. We keep copies of all stories in the raw and subbed forms. This was to allow reporters to access copies of their original stories and subbed stories for their logbooks but it means we have copies of everything as it goes into the system. We keep copies of all type in the original form it was emailed to us, copies after pre-subbing processing has occurred and copies of the final stories. Anything posted on social media will have its source saved. We take on trainees who leave once they have passed the NCE.

Contacting Ipso

We are aware that Ipso offers pre-publication advice but our corrections are the result of mistakes, whether it be a sub's wrong headline or a reporter's mis-reading of a story. We work on the principle of "If in doubt, leave it out" so it is hard to see under what circumstances we would consult with Ipso prior to publication – it would have to be a story we had doubts about in the first place. We have contacted Ipso once this year (see below).

Ipso has raised the issue of how we would handle a story once a complaint had been made to it. The answer is, no differently to how we would handle a story once a complaint had been made by a reader. We answer to our readers and we do not treat reader complaints less seriously because Ipso is not involved. As we pointed out to one complainant, a negative ruling to Ipso would not produce a different outcome to what we do voluntarily.

Potential code breaches

Although we do not alert every complainant to the existence of the editor's code, when we get a complaint that is a possible breach of the code, we do.

Complaints where this has occurred are listed below. As can be seen, this means we have had five complaints in the last 12 months that warranted notification of Ipso to the complainant, and none resulted in an actual complaint.

(1). The only serious inaccuracy we printed was to report that a police officer was riding with a local hunt, and had asked protesting sabs to leave. The story came via social media, and the sabs posted photographic evidence of the officer's presence. The days of being able to speak to police directly are (sadly) long gone, so we contacted the police Press office, which merely said: "An off-duty officer was present".

After publication, it transpired that the officer had not been on the hunt and had attended from home after hearing of the sabs' attendance, and warned both parties about breaching the peace.

The partner of the officer complained via Facebook and we printed a prominent correction. The story was clearly incorrect, though at the time of going to press we had nothing that indicated this. The complainant was happy with this resolution. The officer attracted a lot of abuse via social media but this was nothing to do with our story, which did not go on-line.

(2). A mother complained about her son's inquest. She complained that we had given him his full name (for example Timothy, not Tim, as he might have been known), but was also upset that the single act of stupidity that had led to his death was what he would be remembered for. We resolved this, after some conversation, and ran a tribute piece to him on the anniversary of his death.

(3). We reported that a local shop was for sale and received a complaint that the article was "defamatory, untrue and outright damaging to the business". In fact, the sale was listed on Rightmove, and so was in the public domain, and the loss of business was due to other factors, which were apparent on a Facebook discussion group. We pointed this out to the complainant who admitted they just felt sorry for the owner.

(4) A local politician was upset that we had referred to an official complaint against a colleague made to the party nationally. That complaint was upheld, but our complainant disputed the facts of this and demanded: (i) a formal written undertaking not to repeat any past allegations that had already been (accurately) reported; (ii) a formal written undertaking not to publish any future allegations about any members of the same party "without reasonable evidence to support those allegations", independent of the person making the allegation, and (iii) a private apology be made, but not published.

The initial complaint was so strongly worded that we felt sure we had made an error, and not only referred the complainant to Ipso but referred ourselves, by contacting Ipso to say we had printed a serious inaccuracy.

We then checked our records/past stories and realised we were correct. Ipso advised that the person complaining was not the person referred to in the story, that it would not require any written undertakings to be made, and that the point of going to Ipso was a public – not private – apology. No complaint was made to Ipso and the person named in the story has never complained. We do not understand even why a private apology would be sent to a third party.

(5) The fifth issue over which we pointed a complainant towards Ipso was that dog's dinner of errors that all local weekly editors will have seen: we did not take a photo at the time requested, a report sent to go with the photo we did take came after our deadline and was not used; because our reporter did not have that report, he wrote a unduly brief story that somewhat trivialised what turned out to be a serious topic. We re-ran the story with an extra picture and the correct report the following week, and it was resolved amicably.

Letters

We have noted Ipso's rulings on the need for factual accuracy in letters. We print between four (a quiet week) and seven (exceptionally busy) pages of opinion a week, usually five or six, and are very tolerant of outspoken views and comments. Freedom of speech is only free when it offends.

We introduced a fact-check feature, whereby we check factual claims and run a correction under the letter if needed. This is usually to correct inaccuracies but sometimes will confirm more outlandish true facts. This checking went into overdrive prior to the EU referendum.

The highest number of factual corrections over the past 12 months has concerned migrations and Islam; this policy itself prompted the following complaint: "You have developed a tendency to intervene in things said in letters which criticise Moslems (sic) ... It is conjectured that you are a Moslem (sic) but who knows?"

Usually the errors fact-checked are beliefs that are widespread to some degree, so it is important to flag them as false and not simply delete them. On one occasion a letter was merely a list of internet myths listed as fact, so we pulled the letter but wrote a column bringing the truth to people's attention (attached). Hopefully, this would give them the tools to deal with similar claims on social media. If a letter contained what appeared to be a serious inaccuracy about a local person, we would either correct the letter itself, add a fact-check or not run the letter; this happens perhaps once a year. We have a good relationship with readers and while the fact-checking has a serious aim, we have fun with it. At least one right-wing correspondent now expects his letters to be fact-checked and is disappointed when they are not, while other correspondents ask us to fact-check more trivial issues: we were able to confirm that Hob Nobs really are the best biscuit, for example.

Summary

We have had no complaints referred to IPSO over the year. The one informal contact was over a story where we were in the right. Staff are well aware of their ethical responsibilities and we feel the existence of IPSO has helped reduce the errors we make.

Jeremy Condliffe

Editor/MD/responsible person/chief fact-checker



Attached:

1. SPJ Guidelines
2. Column addressing untruths.
3. Anonymised fact-checked letters. Note that one asks us to check a fact.

CODE *of* ETHICS

PREAMBLE

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity.

The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

SEEK TRUTH AND REPORT IT

Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources whenever possible.
- ▶ Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.
- ▶ Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.
- ▶ Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.
- ▶ Be cautious when making promises, but keep the promises they make.
- ▶ Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- ▶ Consider sources' motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity for sources who may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted.
- ▶ Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.
- ▶ Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public.
- ▶ Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the voiceless.
- ▶ Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- ▶ Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government. Seek to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open, and that public records are open to all.
- ▶ Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
- ▶ Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.
- ▶ Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.
- ▶ Label advocacy and commentary.
- ▶ Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information. Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- ▶ Never plagiarize. Always attribute.

MINIMIZE HARM

Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness.

- ▶ Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Use heightened sensitivity when dealing with juveniles, victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment.
- ▶ Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.
- ▶ Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than public figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. Weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information.
- ▶ Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, even if others do.
- ▶ Balance a suspect's right to a fair trial with the public's right to know. Consider the implications of identifying criminal suspects before they face legal charges.
- ▶ Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.

ACT INDEPENDENTLY

The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- ▶ Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.
- ▶ Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; do not pay for access to news. Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not.
- ▶ Deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.
- ▶ Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Prominently label sponsored content.

BE ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT

Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage and news content.
- ▶ Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
- ▶ Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly.
- ▶ Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.
- ▶ Abide by the same high standards they expect of others.

The SPJ Code of Ethics is a statement of abiding principles supported by additional explanations and position papers (at spj.org) that address changing journalistic practices. It is not a set of rules, rather a guide that encourages all who engage in journalism to take responsibility for the information they provide, regardless of medium. The code should be read as a whole; individual principles should not be taken out of context. It is not, nor can it be under the First Amendment, legally enforceable.

CONTACT THE SOCIETY

For more information on the Society of Professional Journalists or for more on journalism ethics, visit SPJ's website at spj.org or contact SPJ at:

Society of Professional Journalists • Eugene S. Pulliam National Journalism Center
3909 N. Meridian St. • Indianapolis, IN 46208-4011
317.927.8000 • spj@spj.org (email) • spj.org (Web)

Improving & Protecting Journalism



As readers will know, we regularly add footnotes to letters we feel have strayed from valid opinion into portraying as fact information that is either plain wrong, misleading or out of context.

We hit pay dirt this week with a letter that was based solely on fake information and featured only made-up stats, some of which stand up to scrutiny about as well as a pantomime cow in a field of pedigree cattle. (Our correspondent claimed illness and lack of familiarity with the internet were to blame).

As with most hoaxes, this featured the rise of Muslims who are — in case you've not noticed —plotting to take over the country.

We once knew someone who claimed the same about the Chinese, back in the 70s: "All these Chinese takeaways, one in every town — think about it. One day we'll wake up and they'll have murdered us in our beds." Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it?

While we agree with free speech and are happy to run letters and then add a footnote, this one was so bad we felt unable to run it. We worried that someone would read only the letter and not the explanation and go away believing it was true. It would also make our correspondent look a bit daft.

Instead we're going to list the claims in the letter. If you see any of these made anywhere on social media, distrust anything that person has to say.

(1) Source

The letter claimed to contain information from German state statistics in 2007. (Nine years ago, see: the person who invents this rubbish hopes you won't be able to check).

The letter was based on a speech made by Walter Radermacher, the vice-president of Germany's Federal Statistical Office.

He said: "The fall in the German population can no longer be stopped. Its downward spiral is no longer reversible," to which a hoaxer has added the words: "It will be a Muslim state by the year 2050."

Herr Radermacher was talking only of German population trends in general.

He later told the BBC: "The quotation that reads as if the German government believed that Germany will become a Muslim state is simply not true. There is no source which can be quoted that the German government has published such an expression or opinion."

(2) Birthrate

Our correspondent went to great lengths to explain that Muslims would have more children and take over Europe; we rebutted a similar claim last week via Channel 4's FactCheck.

Our correspondent quoted actual figures: in France the "native" birth rate is 1.8 children per family, while for Muslims it's allegedly 8.1.

In reality, the French government doesn't collect statistics by religion, so it's impossible to give the fertility rates among different religious groups. (France's overall rate is 2.08).

Also, no country on earth has such a high fertility rate as 8.1. Algeria and Morocco, the two countries that send the largest numbers of Muslim immigrants to France, have a fertility rate of 2.7 and 2.15.

The country with the top fertility rate is Niger, at 6.89, followed by Mali, 6.16, Burundi, 6.14, Somalia, 6.08, Uganda, 5.97, Burkina Faso, 5.93, Zambia, 5.76, Malawi, 5.66, Afghanistan, 5.43 and Angola, 5.43.

Burundi, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi and Angola are not Muslim. Burkino Faso is 60% Muslim.

Down at the bottom are Bosnia and Herzegovina (1.26) and Albania (1.5), which have around 50% Muslim populations. The Maldives, with a birth rate of 1.76, is 96% Muslim, as is Uzbekistan (1.76). Bahrain and Brunei are both at 1.8, with Azerbaijan and Qatar at 1.9. Looking at political hotbeds, Iran's birthrate is 1.8, Syria 2.6 and Libya 2.0.

There's no evidence that Muslims have a higher birth rate than anyone else, at least not because of their religious beliefs. There is a link between birth rate and poverty, with a high infant mortality rate more of an accurate predictor than religion. (Catholic Ireland has a birth rate of 2.1).

We checked this out: Afghanistan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world (as of 2015) at 115 per 1,000 live births.

Of the top 10 countries for birth rate, another five are also in the top 10 for infant mortality (all 2015 figures, deaths per 1,000 live births): Mali 102.23, Somalia 98.39, Niger 84.59, Angola 78.26 and Burkina Faso 75.32.

Of the rest, Zambia is 17th worst, with 64.72 deaths per 1,000 live births; Burundi is in 20th place with 61.89; Uganda 21st with 59.21. Malawi is the oddity, coming in at 42nd, 46.26/1,000.

By comparison the UK has a rate of 4.38, 187th in the league.

Back to France and its 1.8 children per native family/8.1 for Muslims: it makes no sense anyway. For every single family in France that has one child, a Muslim family must have eight kids, and for every two-child family (the average), there would be a Muslim family with 16 kids.

It's possible that the racist who put out these figures has used the live birth rate: young and healthy migrants will have more children (the live birth rate in Ireland is 16) but no-one would know — France does not record that statistic. The live birth per year will be high if you have a young population, even if those women stop at two kids to give you a low fertility rate.

(3) Over in the UK...

Our correspondent claimed that in the last 30 years, the Muslim population of Great Britain had grown from 82,000 to 2.5 million, a 30-fold increase. Part of that is true: the 2011 census recorded about 2.6 million Muslims in the UK. However, 30 years takes us back to the 1980s and the 1981 census did not ask for respondents' religious beliefs. The creator of this figure has picked 82,000 at random, as it's not in the census.

(4) Baby factories

The letter also claimed that in the Netherlands, 50% of all new-borns were Muslim, while in Belgium, 25% of the population and 50% of all new-borns are Muslim.

In a famous 1978 court case, Mr Justice Foster used the phrase a "moron in a hurry" — specifically only a person of limited intelligence rushing by would have confused the Communist Party's *Morning Star* and Express newspapers' planned title *Daily Star*, he said.

Similar, only a similarly pressed-for-time intellectually challenged individual would believe that half of all babies in Holland were Muslim or that a quarter of the Belgian population was Muslim.

As of 2012, Muslims comprised about 4% of the population of the Netherlands, so for this population to account for "50% of all new-borns," Muslim *wijfs* would have to be popping about two or three babies a year each.

As for Belgium, Muslims are the second-largest religious group in Belgium but account for 4%-5% of the population, making the "50% of all new-borns" as nonsensical as it was in Holland.

(5) Population growth

The letter went on to complain: "Of all population growth in Europe since 1990, 90% has been Islamic immigration."

In fact, immigration drove 85% of the population growth in EU countries in 2005 but that 90% includes all immigrants to EU countries, not just Muslims.

The internet is great; it allows you access to so much information.

But it also exposes people to lies and misinformation, which far too many people are too lazy to check.

This isn't new: our man in the 70s had had the "Chinese rising up" tale from his mates at work and it was presumably held as correct by enough people for it to spread across the country.

Social media just makes it easier to see the guff people believe.

Town hall as 70-ish as Mungo Jerry

Dear Sir, — It's a pity that the £52,000 development cash that was left over when Sainsbury built its store in Biddulph, couldn't go towards the revamping of the town hall. Apparently this cash, or section 106 money, can only be spent on Sainsbury land, or land having direct connection to their store.

As I say, it's a pity because starting in January 2017, Biddulph town hall is due for some reconstruction work and as a focal point to the town, this building is very important to community ventures.

At present the place is very unimposing and looking at it from across the High Street is like looking into the black hole of Calcutta.

So 1970-ish is it in appearance, I keep expecting to see Mungo Jerry come walking out of its front entrance. ('Who's Mungo Jerry?' I hear you young millennials asking? To which I would like to reply, 'Don't ask', but I will go a little further and explain that they were a one hit wonder group of 1970 who luckily ceased to influence popular culture just as quickly as they started and nobody has heard of them since, apart from three die hard fans in Darlington).

Anyway, to get back to our very unwelcoming town hall. In a meeting of the Biddulph Arts Forum last Monday, 5th December, some of the members were saying how difficult it was to advertise coming events in and around this Staffordshire council edifice. There is a glass-fronted box on the front pavement, but in cold weather the glass mists up and nobody can read what's on the posters.

I personally am all for bringing the town hall into the 21st century (well 20th century at least) by investing in an electronic display screen to be erected above the entrance. We could then announce coming events in bright lights (yes, brightness, folks) which could be read from the main street. I'm not expecting us to rival Times Square or Piccadilly Circus just yet, but it's a start.

Biddulph is a big town now, so we'd better stop adopting a little village mentality. Let's advertise the place — it's worth it. — Yours faithfully,

xxx

Factcheck.

Mungo Jerry are alive and kicking, and played locally at a festival not so long ago, and xxx is being harsh to a band who rose to fame in 1970 after a gig in Newcastle-under-Lyme. They had several number ones including *Alright Alright Alright* and the band's Ray Dorset, who now lives in Dorset, wrote *Feels Like I'm in Love* with Kelly Marie, which doubtless xxx has dad-danced to at a wedding at some time. — Editor.

Two complaints are hardly crime wave

Dear Sir, — The title said it all: “Police deal with two complaints of hate crime”. “Biddulph has been caught up in a wave of incidents that has swept through Staffordshire since June”. So said the *Biddulph Chronicle*.

Two complaints? Blimey, such lawlessness must compare with downtown Chicago.

When I was in Macclesfield at the beginning of June, I was called a bast**d because I was wearing a “vote leave” badge, which was showing my allegiance to the Brexit campaign.

I suppose that was a hate crime also, committed against yours truly and had I been offended, in some quarters I would have possibly been within my rights to prosecute the offender.

Maybe, if I’d have belonged to a certain religion, I could have cut the young woman’s head off, but no, all I did was remark on what a lovely woman my assailant was, to come out with such language in the middle of the high street.

Am I the only one who gets the feeling that the media is trying to cultivate a culture of us and them by highlighting such events and then pointing out that this sort of crime has come about since the referendum and is in some way the result of the Brexit vote? Talk about small-mindedness! Talk about bigotry and intolerance! What’s the world coming to? Did we never have these things before?

From around 1997, for over a decade, gangs of Muslim men groomed young girls, some as young as 12 years of age, in the Rotherham child sex exploitation scandal. The inquiry into these abuses claimed that up to 1,400 children had been abused and press ganged into prostitution by Muslim men.

From 2007 to 2010 around 200 young girls were subjected to crimes such as rape, trafficking, physical assaults, abduction and threats to kill in the Sheffield area of South Yorkshire. In almost all these cases of sexual abuse, in both Rotherham and Sheffield, for over a decade, no police action was taken. And guess what? Up until 2013, the media and the police kept schtum about all the reports and accusations regarding child “sexploitation” in these areas. Now that’s what you call double standards.

Could it have been because these crimes were committed by mainly males from the Muslim community?

Compare these instances with the reportage of so called hate crimes over the last few months in, I assume, mainly white communities.

Now last week xxx took umbrage with me calling the EU remain campaigners pathetic losers, but I’m afraid xxx you suffer from association, but I don’t mind you continuing to campaign for your cause. I was just saying that the remainers have a habit of spitting their dummies out and throwing their rattles out of their prams.

And I don't want you to leave us, xxx, but I was pointing out that if you wanted to remain in the EU, a solution would be to move to an EU country.

You call this suggestion divisive, but what's more divisive than the remain camp's suggestion that the over 70s age group should not be allowed to vote? A large percentage of over 70s bothered to vote, whereas the 18 to 25 age group was down among the 31% turnout group. The editor of the *Chron* will no doubt correct me on this.

As for Turkey, I agree with you that a large proportion of educated Turks will not accept Erdogan's coup, because that's what it really was, but now that that tyrant has got supreme power I can't see anybody toppling him.

As for Turkey entering the EU, well Greece should never have got in, but Merkel and her cronies are far too greedy to let another opportunity to exploit a country slip out of their grasp. The trouble with Merkel is she'd do a deal with the devil if she thought it was furthering her cause for a German dominant Europe. I rest my case. — Yours faithfully,

XXXXXX

Factcheck.

- **Hate crime:** is a criminal offence committed against a person (or property) motivated by hostility towards race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality or national origins, religion; gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age. Being abused for wearing a badge would be a public order offence, not a hate crime.

- **"Muslim gangs":** As we have said before, all ethnicities are represented in grooming gangs, but a disproportionate number of offenders are Asian.

Of 52 groups where ethnicity data was provided by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (Ceop) in 2014, 26 (50%) comprised all Asian offenders, 11 (21%) were all white, nine (17%) groups had offenders from multiple ethnicities, four (8%) were all black offenders and there were two (4%) exclusively Arab groups.

Of the 306 offenders whose ethnicity was noted, 75% were categorised as Asian, 17% white, and the remaining 8% black (5%) or Arab (3%).

Paedophile rings, on the other hand, are exclusively of white ethnicity.

As with most things, the issue is complex. Sentencing nine men in 2012 in Rochdale, Judge Gerald Clifton told the defendants that one of the factors was that the victims were not Muslim, but at the Derby trial in 2010 the judge said he thought the race of the victims and their abusers was coincidental.

Ceop itself points out that the comparative levels of freedom that white British children enjoy in comparison to some other ethnicities may make them more vulnerable to exploitation. They are also more likely to report abuse.

Whatever: people who commit these crimes are vile human beings, regardless of their circumstances.

Brexit vote: no exit polls were taken, so it is impossible to say how many young (or old) people voted. Anyone who gives figures is relying on past election turn-outs, not the actual Brexit vote — Editor.

What next in this crazy world?

Dear Sir, — A week is a long time in the world of news and by the time the *Chron* readers read this the Pope could have resigned, the England footballers could have lost 3-0 to the Faroe Isles in a World Cup qualifying round (highly probable) and World War Three might have just finished, having lasted only three days and the world, in the meantime, having been reduced to charred toast. In which case, aren't you a lucky so-and-so to be reading this?

Seriously though, as I write this, news is coming onto the airwaves that three American police officers have been gunned down and killed in what appears to be an ambush shooting in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This crime is no doubt a revenge killing for the death of Alton Stirling, a black teenager who was killed by a police officer after it was reported that he was in a car park, threatening somebody with a gun.

The video footage of the police officer shooting Mr Stirling while they pinned him to the ground was indeed condemning, but what's gone wrong with the world?

Does this mean it is right to go and shoot innocent cops? Remember that the vast majority of blacks in America are not killed by police officers, but by other blacks. Are we justified therefore, if we go around shooting innocent black people?

In the other big news of the week, the carnage in Nice is heartbreaking with its sheer brutality. Such a lovely city, with such beautiful people and for no other reason than they happened to be there at the time was enough for them to be mown down.

The attacker, Mohamed Bouhlel was a career criminal and wife beater, who just a few days before his rampage had sent £84,000 to his relatives. Now where does an ordinary truck driver get that sort of money?

Apparently, he'd been plotting his massacre and drove his truck down the Promenade des Anglais on the two previous days to the attack, sizing up the area and what he was going to do. A cold blooded killer. He texted messages to accomplices just hours before the attack asking for more weapons.

Bouhlel's wife, who had left him because of his violence towards her, was arrested but set free after the questioning. Up to seven people have been arrested in connection with Bouhlel.

Where do the French go from here? Over the last 18 months there have been on average a terrorist attack every two months on French soil. In 2015, there were 36 terrorist incidents with 161 deaths, so far in 2016, there have been four attacks and 86 deaths. The French have become sitting ducks for Isil terrorism.

In an ICM poll, 16% of French citizens supported Isil, or were sympathisers. In the 18 to 24 year olds, this sympathy with Isil spiked at an alarming 27% (*See footnote – Editor*).

The Arab Centre for Research and Studies found that even in the refugees, supposedly fleeing terror, 13% coming from Syria supported Isil (*See footnote – Editor*).

How can the French security services hope to cope with such numbers? It seems like they can't.

Even French Prime Minister Manuel Valls more or less conceded defeat by saying France would have to live with terrorism. So get used to being murdered in your scores and maybe hundreds, French people, because your leaders don't know what to do to stem the tide of atrocities.

What a great exhortation for Isil eh? They must be rejoicing all the way from Tower Hamlets to the Bosphorus and Baghdad.

With leaders like this, do the French people need enemies? With weak-kneed President Hollande (who won't survive the next election) the French economy will do well to escape destabilisation. ISIS is winning the French war, folks. Time for change. Time to help those poor French citizens.

There are about six million Muslims, or just under 10% of the French population, living in France at present (*See footnote – Editor*). However, according to the Daily Telegraph, up to 70% of France's prison population is Muslim. Award yourselves another gold star all you multiculturalists. Islam really does enrich western civilisation, doesn't it? Lastly, can I just say that I don't agree with the appointment of Theresa May as our Prime Minister. I wanted Andrea Leadsom, purely and simply because she has nicer legs. Now I've had a word with some of our dumber students, who've suggested I call for a rerun of the voting.

We have organised a protest march through Downing Street of seven people and one dog, demanding our democratic rights to vote again because we believe Andrea was forced to quit the race for nomination as our country's leader, unduly. We shall continue our demands for reruns until this country comes to its senses and votes for Andrea Leadsom as our next Prime Minister.

After all, my dumbed-down friends tell me, that's what democracy means. — Yours faithfully,

xxxx

Factcheck.

- It seems very doubtful that “16% of French citizens support Isil”. No-one knows the Muslim population of France — the state does not keep a record — but assuming that it's in the region of the UK's 5% (ie 5% of the UK population is Muslim) that would mean that every single Muslim — whether Sunni or not — supported Isil, plus 10% of the non-Muslim population. Even if you accept that 10% of the French are Muslim — and not all are Sunnis — that means that 6% of non-Muslims would support Isil for that figure to be correct.

- However: “There are about

six million Muslims, or just under 10% of the French population.” Nobody knows. The state does not keep records. According to Wikipedia the US places it at 10% but the *CIA World Factbook* places it at 5–10%. Two 2007 polls estimated it at about 3%, a Pew Forum study, in 2011 estimated 4.7m Muslims while academic Jean-Paul Gourevitch said there were 7.7m Muslims (about 11% of the population) in 2011.

- Irrespective of numbers, ICM Research, which conducted the poll, told the *Washington Post* that it was unable to break down its results along religious lines, so for all xxx knows, no Muslims and 16% of non-Muslims in France support Isil.

- As *The Sun* found out it its cost, polls can be easy to get wrong. ICM asked people if they supported “The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” not Isil. How many people thought they meant Iraq, in its fight against Isil?

- The Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies found that 4% of Syrian refugees had a positive view of Isil, with 9% “positive to some extent” which is xxxx’s 13%; 73% had a negative view (the rest did not answer). Of those who had a positive view, 15% of respondents cited Isil’s “military achievements” and 14% the declaration of an Islamic Caliphate (the largest proportions of such answers came Tunisia, Palestine, Egypt and Jordan, not Syria — the figures came from a large survey, not just of refugees).

The centre said: “Understanding and investigating the rationale behind such attitudes is undoubtedly a pressing concern. Arab public opinion provides a number of arguments to explain Isil’s popularity among its supporters, the most important of these being the group’s military achievements, its adherence to religious principles, its preparedness to confront the West and its self-proclaimed status as a defender of the Sunni Muslim community in Iraq and Syria.” Of the Syrians, 80% thought Isil was a threat to their country.